

Research Project: Dimensions of Wellbeing

2021-2026

PIs: Dr Mona Simion and Dr. Christoph Kelp

Postdoc: Christopher Willard-Kyle

Host Institution: COGITO Epistemology Research Centre, University of Glasgow, UK.

Funders: Therme Group Austria and the University of Glasgow.

1. Summary

This project develops an integrated account of the nature of wellbeing along several dimensions – i.e. cognitive, emotional, social and physical wellbeing. In this, it will be the first of its kind to approach what is an important question in bioethics: ‘What is wellbeing?’ – one that has wider implications beyond the academy, for industry and public policy – in a way that is seriously informed from work in contemporary applied ethics, epistemology, philosophy of emotions, philosophy of psychology, philosophy of medicine, and philosophy of biology. Furthermore, the project will connect research in the philosophy of wellbeing with research in psychology and human enhancement in a way that suitably grounds each *form* of enhancement in the kind of normativity distinctive to it (cognitive, emotional, social, and biological respectively). In this respect, the proposed project offers one of the best chances yet to bring the timely and practically important matter of how these forms of enhancement might advance wellbeing and flourishing for the first time under intellectual control.

2. State of the Art

Debates surrounding the nature of wellbeing have largely been conducted in philosophy and psychology separately from each other. Philosophers have looked into the nature of the phenomenon via conceptual and metaphysical analysis. Psychologists have used empirical investigation to figure out what generates wellbeing in people like us.

Needless to say, the absence of synergy between the two fields of research has created research blind spots in both camps: on one hand, philosophical research has proceeded largely uninformed by actual people's experiences, and has relied merely upon theoretical intuitions in favour or against a theory of wellbeing. On the other hand, in trying to investigate what generates wellbeing in actual people without being informed by a philosophical theory of the nature of wellbeing, psychologists have encountered the difficulty of lack of clarity concerning what it is that they should be testing to begin with.

3. Research Objectives

This project has two research objectives, one theoretical and one applied. It aims to:

1. Develop a novel, integrated theory of wellbeing.
2. Apply the resulting theory to the field of human enhancement, and thus facilitate the implementation of enhancement technologies.

4. Methodology

Work Package 1. Wellbeing: An Etiological Functionalist Account

The project will argue for a broadly Aristotelian, multi-dimensional conception of wellbeing, grounded in the philosophy of biological

functions. In particular, it will be argued that human systems serve etiological cognitive, emotive, social and physical functions, which, in turn, generate biological norms for proper functioning. Full wellbeing, it is argued, arises when these norms are met across all dimensions.

Work Package 2. Nature, Technological Enhancements and Well-being

One of the most timely interdisciplinary research areas in contemporary philosophy—one that spans ethics, epistemology, the philosophy of medicine, and technology—is that of human enhancement. Unlike traditional therapeutic medical improvements, which aim to restore individuals to normal healthy levels of functioning (e.g., following injury or disease), human *enhancement* takes advantage of the latest science and medicine to bring individuals *beyond* normal healthy levels of functioning in order to gain various kinds of advantages, including intellectual, moral, and emotional advantages. There are broadly three key strands of human enhancement that have been of special interest to philosophers in so far as each aims, in a distinctive way, to improve the quality of our lives by improving (different aspects of) our minds: these are (i) moral enhancement (ii) cognitive enhancement and (iii) emotional enhancement.

Unfortunately, moral enhancement, cognitive enhancement and emotional enhancement have been woefully underexplored *in connection with each other*, and this is due to the fact that these topics are so often pursued in relative isolation, by bioethicists interested in ethics, epistemology and the philosophy of emotion, respectively, but not jointly. And consequently, there is as of yet no substantial work that investigates how these three varieties of enhancement contribute *jointly*, as opposed to merely *separately*, to overall human well-being and flourishing.

The second stage will aim to supply this lack by furthering research into this question.

5. Impact

In 2018, the COGITO Epistemology Research Centre launched a large-scale impact collaboration with Therme Group (Austria) on the philosophy of wellbeing. [Therme Group](#) is a multinational wellness company, whose principal projects include large-scale, high-tech and environmentally informed holiday parks. Therme's overarching philosophical mission is to utilise modern technology in a way that enhances and promotes experiences of *overall* physical and mental wellbeing.

COGITO research results on the etiological function of architecture have already been implemented in the design of two Therme facilities (Bucharest Extension and Manchester).

This project builds upon this already successful collaboration to develop further research results in the nature of wellbeing and to implement them across Therme facilities around the world.

6. Resources

332,075.30 funding for (1) a 5-year fellowship on 'The Nature of Wellbeing;' the fellow will be a specialist in the philosophy of wellbeing and human enhancement with competences in epistemology and/or the philosophy of biology/emotions, (2) teaching buyout for the two PIs (Dr. Mona Simion and Dr. Christoph Kelp) and (3) travel and conference organising.

Salary for G. 7, spine 34 PDRA for 5 years from 01/01/2020

NI and Superann = £74,608.10

Salary = £212,042.70

Total PDRA Salary = £286,650.80

Simion – 0.05 FTE (2 hours a week for 60 months)

NI and Superann - £4454.72

Salary - £12,808.87

Total Simion Salary - £17,263.59

Kelp - 0.05 FTE (2 hours a week for 60 months)

NI and Supann - £5375.12

Salary - £15,285.79

Total Kelp Salary - £20,660.91

DI Other Costs for Travel, Conference and Workshop:

£7500

Total (Salary and DI Costs): 332,075.30